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ABSTRACT

Formative evaluations were conducted for the last four rough-cut instructional television programs--"Peers," "Friendship," "Prejudice," and "Thinking"--from "On the Level," a series of 12 lessons designed to aid secondary school students in dealing with personal and social growth. The following programs were viewed by small groups of students at the Educational Film Center: "Friendship: A Little Help from My Friends"; "Peers: Surrounded"; "Prejudice: Side by Side"; and "Thinking: Alternative Route." Results indicated that the first two programs were successful overall, were appealing, and elicited discussion on the program messages. The third program was difficult to judge because two viewing groups reacted differently. Overall, the program appeared to be appealing and was successful in eliciting animated discussion, but one group questioned its realism. The fourth program was not successful. Although it held the students' attention, they thought it was unrealistic and in poor taste, did not identify with the characters, and found the main character unappealing. The program's messages were not discussed in any depth. (LMM)

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Research Report 76

Formative Evaluation:
Friendship/Peers/Prejudice/Thinking

September 1980

Agency for Instructional
Television
Box A
Bloomington, Indiana 47402

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SMALL GROUP PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

The last four "On the Level" rough-cut programs which were produced were evaluated with small groups of students at the Educational Film Center. The lack of access to schools during the summer as well as the tight production schedule made these small group evaluations the most feasible and productive way of providing quick evaluation information to the writers/producers. Furthermore, the evaluator, based on her observations and discussions with over 4,000 teenagers during previous "On the Level" evaluations, felt confident in generalizing from the small group discussions to a larger audience of teenage viewers. The formative evaluation results of the four programs: Peers, Friendship, Prejudice, and Thinking are presented in the next sections.

I. Friendship: "A Little Help from My Friends"

Friendship was viewed by a total of 10 high school students in three separate groups. There was an equal number of males and females and good representation of black and Hispanic students.

During viewing, attention level was very high with students' showing signs of identification, empathy, and anticipation. One of the first responses immediately following viewing was the realization that "Hector

didn't have much help from his friend." During the follow-up discussions students focused on their identification with the characters and talked about the program's messages. Students were also able to pinpoint particular scenes which were confusing or unrealistic to them.

(1) Students had high identification with program characters.

"I could really relate to Beto because I know people like that."

"It's all real. It's happened a million times."

"There are a lot of people like that--they expect you to give but they won't pay you back."

(2) Students were able to abstract the messages in the program.

"One's idea of friends might not be what it seems to be."

"Not everyone is what they appear to be."

"Don't let people dump on you."

"Friends aren't always friends."

"You may not get a little help from your friends when you really need it."

"Friendship needs two people working both ways."

- Students especially realized that Hector had changed.

"Hector learned from his mistakes."

"He became more hostile toward Beto."

"He became more self-confident--got the courage to be on his own and get new friends."

- Students commented on the complexity of the characters, realizing neither one was really "good" or "bad."

(3) If the program were to continue, most students think that Hector and Beto would not be good friends. They said Beto didn't learn anything and that he would probably use a new group of people. They remarked that was good--so you learn to stay away from people like Beto.

- However, two students did think that Beto would try harder in the friendship.

(4) A number of scenes were confusing or unrealistic to the students.

a) The students were confused by the opening scene.

Although the students realized Hector was drunk, they did not know what time of day it was. They wondered if he had been drunk during the night and slept in the car, or whether he got drunk during his lunch hour. Some students said they were confused because they thought Hector was going to be the "bad guy" in the friendship.

b) Some girls mentioned that they got the girls in the program mixed up.

They wanted to know if they had seen (or heard about) the girl on the beach (Yolie) before the beach scene.

c) Over half the students were somewhat confused about the scene where Hector goes to take Theresa to the concert.

Some students said they thought Hector was going to take over Theresa if Beto didn't want her. They mentioned that bringing her a flower indicated an interest.

- However, one student responded: "When she said, 'Oh you're a nice friend,' you knew it was on the level."

d) One group complained that the basketball scene seemed just stuck in.

However, when questioned, all students remembered verbatim the lines in the scene. Furthermore, they realized the importance of the scene to establish Hector as honest and caring and to show Hector exercising so he could get the girls.

e) All the students complained about Theresa taking everything so easily.

They especially wanted her to get mad at Beto for going off in the car with another girl.

- However, the students did realize Theresa's behavior was realistic: It was consistent with her character and "There are quiet people like that."

f) Almost all students objected to the car scene with Beto and the lost driver.

They thought the scene was confusing:

"Did they already know each other?"

And unrealistic:

"They were petting each other and they hadn't met before??"

"A girl asking directions wouldn't invite an unknown man into the car."

g) Some students objected to the scene at the beach when the girl Hector is going to date (Yolie) waves her hand in an alluring way. They thought it was unrealistic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, "A Little Help from My Friends" was a successful program. It was appealing and realistic and elicited discussion on the program's messages. However, evaluation suggested revisions to make particular scenes more understandable and realistic. In a discussion with the evaluator and writer/producers the following decisions were made:

a) Time of day in the opening scene would be clarified.

b) Voice-over lines will be added to clarify the conversation between Hector and Beto as they talk about Hector's interest in the girl, Yolie.

c) The relationship between Hector and Theresa as they go to the concert will not be clarified so as to allow discussion of male/female friendship, e.g., can a boy give a flower to a girl and still be "just friends"?

d) Concerning the stuck-in basketball scene, voice-over will overlap the preceding scene so it flows better and a long-shot of the harbor will be added to aid transition to the following scene.

e) Theresa's passive behavior will not be changed. Her behavior is apparently typical of Latino women and will hopefully allow for discussion on the alternative ways she could have behaved.

f) The car scene with Beto and the lost driver will be edited to eliminate the "petting" relationship.

g) A more appropriate shot of the girl, Yolie, on the beach will replace the present shot.

II. Peers: "Surrounded"

Peers was viewed by a total of 8 high school students in two groups of 4 students each. There was an equal number of males and females.

During viewing, attention level was very high and the students seemed very much involved with the storyline. Immediately following viewing some of the students exclaimed, "I loved it!" "Fantastic!"

"Does she tell them or doesn't she?" "She does, I know she does." The students immediately began talking about alternatives to the way the program characters could have behaved and what the students themselves would have done in similar circumstances. Other discussion focused on the relationship between peer group memberships and being an individual.

(1) Most students remarked they were initially surprised with the inconsistency of the gang. At first they all seemed nice, happy, and good friends, but later, all of a sudden, there was hostility. They realized, however, that this was a realistic portrayal of a gang, and that not everyone in a gang has the same interests.

(2) Students related their own experiences with friends:

"My friends wouldn't get mad if I..."

"I don't get mad at my friends..."

"A lot of my friends..."

(3) All students realized that Charlie and Kelly were good friends, but that's <u>all</u>.

"They were better friends than the others because they were both different."

"It was obvious that in their relationship it didn't make a difference if they were black, white, male, or female."

- Students realized that Charlie and Kelly were "both worried they'd be outcasts." They especially liked Charlie's line, "We'll start our own gang."

(4) The students discussed the alternative ways the mother might have dealt with Kelly. They also discussed the mother's reasons for being so worried and protective--Kelly's epilepsy.

(5) The students received the following messages from the program:

"You have to do what you have to do. Relationships based on lies are not strong."

"With friends you worry that if you say something they won't like you."

"Be honest."

"If friends don't have the same concerns and interests they can still be your friends."

"Do your own thing."

"Be an individual."

"In a peer group you can compromise as well as follow."

Conclusions

"Surrounded" was a successful program. Students liked it, thought the characters and situations were realistic, identified with the characters, understood the plot, and discussed the program's intended messages. Thus evaluation affirmed the program and no revisions were necessary.

III. Prejudice: "Side by Side"

Sample: 13 high school students from the Washington D.C./Northern Virginia area viewed and discussed Prejudice. The students were divided into two groups: Group I consisted of 3 boys and 4 girls. One girl was Oriental and one girl was mixed background. Six students were seniors and one was a junior. Group II consisted of 3 boys and 3 girls. Two girls were black. Four students were juniors and two were sophomores. The viewing and discussion took place at the Educational Film Center (EFC) in Northern Virginia.

The two groups reacted very differently to this program and thus their reactions will be reported separately.

Group I

Group I was a very loud, high-strung group of teenagers who were in a very gay mood upon their arrival at EFC. They found the program very amusing and laughed loudly at many segments which had no humorous intent. Although they said they liked the program overall, especially the ending, they were very critical of specific actions of the characters, citing them as unrealistic or stereotyped. However, when the topic of discussion

was not the program itself, the students engaged in animated discussion about issues concerning prejudice, related their own experiences, and discussed alternative ways to deal with prejudice situations. A greater understanding of prejudice was reached when a Chinese student related her own experiences with prejudice.

During viewing the students laughed at: the "Pong's Toy Store" sign, prom discussion, Jennifer's mother's shrug following Nancy's help with groceries, Richard's car, Richard calling Nancy "Susie Wong," the garbage Nancy's brother put in Jennifer's way, Nancy's mother's line "Go get Jennifer something to eat," and the blood on Nancy's brother.

Following are some highlights of the discussion:

(1) Much of the discussion focused on a Chinese girl in the group who related her own experiences with prejudice since she came to America 6 years ago. The Chinese student said she was quite embarrassed at the other students' laughter--she couldn't understand how people could laugh at such a serious subject. She was prompted a number of times in discussion to say, "I feel so uncomfortable here with everyone laughing." She corrected some students' word usage with reference to Asian people, and at times explained the Chinese customs in the program.

- The student related her experiences working with "Boat Children" and the prejudice they had to endure. She said she had wanted to stand up for the boat people, but she was outnumbered and "they would have beat me up." She concluded, "Sometimes you can't stand up for yourself or other people experiencing prejudice."

(2) Another student (white, male) related his experience living in Japan. He said when he was younger he used to be prejudiced, but he understands more now and feels better about himself.

(3) The students received the following <u>messages</u> from the program:

Friends are more important than social status.

Boyfriends are for now. Friendships last forever.

The way people are about prejudice.

Like people for who they are.

(4) At first the students weren't sure Richard was prejudiced--thought it might just be the country club.

(5) They thought Jennifer's mother changed from the beginning--became like Richard. They thought she was realistic, and added she might be prejudiced because she wasn't well-educated--she ran a beauty parlor. They also thought maybe she didn't really hate Asians, she just wanted her own daughter to get ahead in the world, with Richard.

(6) They thought the fight scene was unrealistic and they knew the blood wasn't real. After the fight, the brother looked too "slumped out."

(7) They questioned the realism of the program:

"It's worse in real life. This is like a fairy tale--that's why we laughed."

"Why does Richard call the brother 'boy'--realistically he'd use a slang term."

"They had been friends for a long time--Jen should have stood up more for herself."

"At first Jennifer says she really doesn't know Richard--then next they're all over each other."

"The beginning seemed too scripted. They need to be more relaxed--more cool. You knew they were acting."

(8) They especially liked Nancy's mother: "She was nice and understanding." "She wasn't mad at Jennifer--she understood."

(9) All but one of the group interpreted the jumping rope as live action and the first still as the first flashback.

Group II

Group II watched the program attentively and seriously, without much laughter. Their immediate response was that it was a very realistic program--direct and right to the point. They said the two girls were especially realistic, and that the brother and Richard were "extremists." And, although they liked the end, they wanted the program to continue.

A synopsis of some of the discussion follows:

(1) They realized Jennifer's mother was like Richard. She didn't seem to care about her daughter. They said although parents are usually more understanding, there are parents like that and they've seen it happen before.

(2) They thought Nancy's mother was sweet, nice, and realistic, and she tried to solve the problem.

(3) They thought the end of the fight scene was unrealistic:

"Looked like a vampire. Seemed too satisfied."

(4) They received the following messages from the program:

"It showed you what not to do--don't hold prejudice because of someone's background."

"Don't judge a book by its cover."

"Realistic prejudice can happen."

"Recognize people who are prejudiced."

"If you experience prejudice--telling the person immediately is very important. It made it worse that they didn't talk."

(5) The flashbacks were confusing for more than half the group.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The program "Side by Side" is hard to judge because of the very different reactions of two small groups. Overall the teenagers seemed to find the program appealing, although one of the groups questioned the program's realism. The program was successful in eliciting animated discussion about issues concerning prejudice and helping the students talk about their own experiences. In discussion with the evaluation and writer/producers the following program revisions were agreed upon:

a) Visual effects will be used to make the flashbacks.

b) The brother's reaction shot to the fight with his "fake blood" will be replaced by a more realistic shot.

IV. Thinking: "Alternative Route"

Sample: The two groups who viewed "Prejudice" also viewed "Thinking."

Group I

During Viewing: Group I was very attentive and reactive during viewing. They laughed at the first introduction to the boys, said, "She loves it" to Lisa's fooling around at the gas station, anticipated the

car failing, and remarked of the boy's chasing: "Oh no, they're drunk, they're mad, they're crazy, this is really weird, gross, oh--I do not believe this..." And, at the house scene: "Do I have to stay and watch this? This is gross. They are so repulsive." At the end they commented: "How can they laugh about it?".

They were especially sarcastic at Kate's face-to-camera "thinking" segments: "What a baby, she's talking to herself?, (in a corny-making voice:) Where am I? What's going on?" "This is just like a commercial." "She has the whitest teeth." "Who is she talking to?"

Discussion:

(1) [I immediately asked, "What was the program about?"]

"Think."

"Don't talk to strangers."

"Be better prepared."

"But it didn't come through."

(2) The students made the following remarks about the boys:

"Tripping--drunk--tripping--I've seen people blitzed--but how could they be so drunk but run so well through the woods?"

"When they were facing opposite each other in the woods, it was corny."

(3) The students reacted very negatively toward Kate.

"The blonde, she was an air brain."

"Yeah--a real air head."

"She thought slow."

"She lacked confidence."

"She was a follower, not a leader."

- They all remarked that the way she thought was not an effective way of dealing with the situation. They said she was always questioning, she wasn't confident with her decisions, she didn't carry her decisions out, and she, in sum, didn't model effective thinking.

(4) They found Lisa the more appealing of the two girls, and said she was "over-confident," a leader, and "someone who didn't have to think." One girl also remarked she was like a "10-year-old brat."

(5) Some students didn't understand why Kate kept saying they had to find the lake.

"What was the deal with the lake?"

"Why go to the lake?"

(6) The rest of the discussion focused on their perceptions of the program's overtones: rape.

"It was like a rape movie."

"I thought I'd throw up."

"At first the girls were acting so young, and then all of a sudden it seemed like an X-rated movie."

"What was the purpose?"

"All I could think of was sex--they were out for one thing--and were going to do it with a crowbar and then kill them with the rifle."

"The chasing in the woods made it seem even more porno."

"When he was playing with the knife it was sick."

"And the worst was in the house, when he pushes her down on the couch like a dog.... Then I knew it would be rape."

Group II

During Viewing: Attentive throughout viewing and not as creative during viewing as the first group.

Discussion:

(1) The students immediately objected to the ending.

"It needs another end."

"They shouldn't have taken it so lightly."

"They should have been concerned."

"They shouldn't have laughed so much after that happened."

(2) They said the message of the program was:

"Don't be impulsive."

"Look before you jump."

"How could you miss the point—she kept saying 'think,' 'think'..."

(3) They especially criticized Kate's "thinking" segments:

"The blonde said too many times--'got to think about.'"

"She was a dumb blonde."

"Her talks to camera were really bad--unrealistic--she knew we were there."

"She was acting it out--not living it."

"Should have had her thinking, but not seen it."

[Like the first time she was thinking?]

"Oh—that was confusing. I thought maybe the other girl was talking."

"She just kept saying 'think'--she didn't do anything about it."

"She kept saying, 'What should I do? What is morally right?' People don't think like that. They don't think that far in advance. Seemed unrealistic."

"The blonde character seemed like she knew what to do but was easily led by other people."

"It was a good show but the thinking process was overemphasized. Don't have her talk to the camera. That was awful. Have it with voice-over, and not so loud."

(4) They thought the men were unrealistic and they thought their intent was to rape and kill.

"The men were unrealistic--why a rifle and a crow iron? It was a bit much--even to scare."

"They said they weren't going to hurt them."

"Yeah--but they wanted to rape them, and then kill--especially in the house."

"The guys were too silly. I knew they were drunk, but not that drunk."

"Rape starts coming in when he pushes her down on the couch."

Conclusions and Recommendations

"Alternative Route" was not a successful program. Although it held the students' attention, the students thought the program was unrealistic and in poor taste. They did not identify with the characters, and found Kate, the girl who was supposed to model effective thinking, especially unappealing. The program's messages were not discussed in any depth.

It was agreed that this program needed substantial revisions throughout. The program was completely revised in an attempt to:

a) Soften the overtones of rape and make the intent of the boys to tease and scare.

b) Make Kate more effective and appealing during her thinking processes.

c) Revise the ending to make the girls' reaction more appropriate with the preceding events.